

## Toppling strongholds

### Record abortion clinic closings yield hope, prayers in Miss.

"Knowing that the former abortion clinic I once ran is now closing is the biggest personal victory of my life."

Abby Johnson

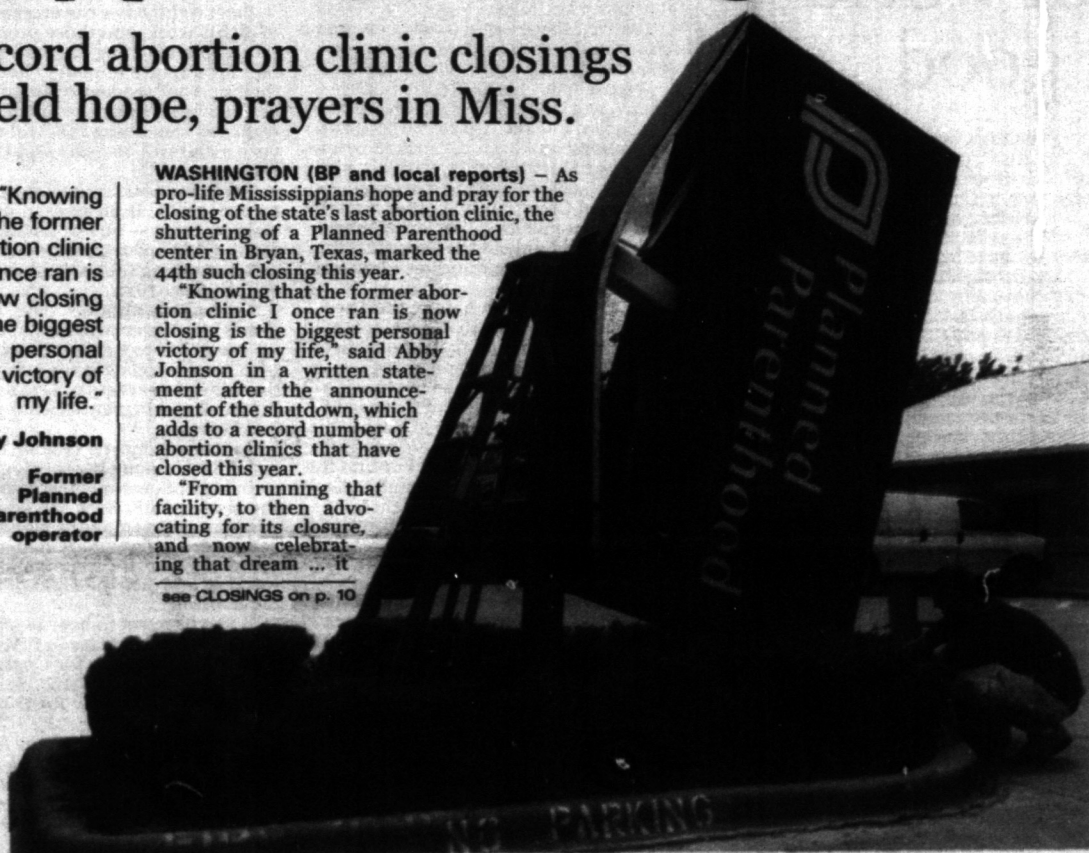
Former  
Planned  
Parenthood  
operator

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — As pro-life Mississippians hope and pray for the closing of the state's last abortion clinic, the shuttering of a Planned Parenthood center in Bryan, Texas, marked the 44th such closing this year.

"Knowing that the former abortion clinic I once ran is now closing is the biggest personal victory of my life," said Abby Johnson in a written statement after the announcement of the shutdown, which adds to a record number of abortion clinics that have closed this year.

"From running that facility, to then advocating for its closure, and now celebrating that dream ... it

see CLOSINGS on p. 10



**RIISING TREND** — Signage outside a Planned Parenthood clinic in Bryan, Texas, comes down in late August, marking another of the record 44 abortion clinic closings so far this year. (BP photo courtesy of 40 Days for Life and Coalition for Life)

## San Antonio clamps down on sexual orientation 'bias'

SAN ANTONIO (BP) — The San Antonio (Texas) City Council passed by an 8-3 vote a controversial ordinance Sept. 5 by which city officials can be removed from office and businesses can be made liable if it is determined "a bias in word or deed" on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity has been exhibited.

For businesses that offer services to the general public, the ordinance makes such discrimination a Class C misdemeanor punishable by fines of up to \$500. Last-minute amendments clarified that the measure does not require businesses to allow transgendered persons to use restrooms or locker rooms intended

for people of the opposite sex — a change that angered some of the ordinance's supporters.

The ordinance is "one of the most dangerous constitutional violations Liberty Institute has ever seen" limiting free speech and religious liberty, the conservative advocacy organization said in a news release.

"The ordinance is a cloudy and confusing collection of poorly thought out and conflicting statements that could have been more clearly and cleanly handled by simply including a broad religious liberty exemption to protect the free speech and religious liberty rights of both individuals and organizations that have reli-

gious objections to the requirements mandated by the ordinance," said Kelly Shackelford, president of Liberty Institute, based in Plano, Texas.

The ordinance "should alarm every American who values their religious freedom" and has ramifications that "could go far beyond San Antonio," Shackelford said.

City officials received 11,000 opposition emails in the weeks leading up to the vote, and five City Council meetings on the ordinance drew hundreds of residents who expressed their opposition.

In an Aug. 28 meeting, city officials appeared confused about the measure's legal consequences, with the city's attorney strug-

gling to answer questions and expressing concerns that he was embarrassing himself.

Whether transgendered people should be allowed to use any restroom they choose was a significant part of the discussion, with some homosexual rights activists saying they were opposed to the ordinance because it did not protect the right of men to use women's bathrooms and vice versa.

Earlier in the day councilman Diego Bernal, who spearheaded the ordinance, floated a new draft specifying that the measure would not change the city's laws prohibiting the use of restrooms for "persons of the opposite sex."

## Ethicists: no 'just cause' for possible Syria attack

NASHVILLE (BP) — The United States should not intervene in Syria because the conditions for a "just war" have not been met, according to two Southern Baptist ethicists.

Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, said in an article on Religion News Service Sept. 3 that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad is "lawless and tyrannical," and the first principle of just war — a just cause — has been met.

"That said, there are other principles missing here, both to justify action morally and to justify it prudentially," Moore stated.

Daniel Heimbach, senior professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., offered a slightly different take on Syria, stating that the United States lacks a basis for intervening "in the internal affairs of a distinctly sovereign and separate state."

"I see here no legitimately interpreted just cause sufficient to justify the United States going to war with Syria merely because parties in a civil war are

### Inside

Directions .....

Sunday School .....

Lessons .....

Editorial .....

Bibliocipher .....

How to Become  
a Christian .....

Revivals &

Homecomings .....

Just for the Record .....

Classifieds .....

SEP 19 2013

9

6, 7, 9

9



## From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

# State of world not good

**T**he world is in flames. That's not startling news considering the history of the human race, but it does seem that right now there is a large amount of spiritual darkness and concomitant violence on this orb of ours.

Much of the violence is directed at Christians. Make no mistake — our brothers and sisters around the world are being hunted down like animals and, in many cases, tortured and put to death in horrifying ways too graphic to describe in a family newspaper such as *The Baptist Record*.

We need to understand their plight, though. It's difficult for American Christians to relate, given that we don't have to meet for worship in frozen caves or keep a watchful eye on the church door in case it's our day to be pillaged by soldiers of a corrupt and soulless government. Our pastors are not beaten nearly to death on a routine basis, and they are not imprisoned and starved just for preaching the Gospel.

When we gather for worship, the entrance is paved and the temperature is controlled and the pews are padded. Our leather-wrapped Bibles come in more translations than one can count, and we have so many of them at our disposal that if we misplace one, it's no big deal to go out and acquire another.

We don't know what it's like to possess a Bible at the risk of immediate execution. We've never witnessed someone being torn apart by guard dogs at a prison camp because he/she won't renounce his/her faith. We can't imagine what it feels like to be trapped inside a house of worship with our families as it is burned down around us.

In Sudan, the Islamist government has promised to exterminate the country's Christian population. China's communist leaders are stepping up their repressive policies against all faiths, Christian or not. Buddhist extremists across Asia are perse-

cuting Christians. Elsewhere in this issue of *The Baptist Record* is an account of what's happening to Christians in the Central African Republic, which has been declared by the United Nations to be without a functional government and where Islamists have moved in to try to establish sharia (Islamic) law.

Coptic Christians in Egypt are near extinction. The historic Christian town of Maaloula in Syria, where Christians still speak Aramaic, the language of Christ, has been set upon by radical Muslim supporters of rebels linked to Al-Qaeda as the town has changed hands several times between government forces and the rebels.

In the State of Borno in Northern Nigeria, the local government has begun to demolish 25 Christian churches for no reason at all. Boko Haram, an Islamist terror group after the form of Al-Qaeda, can't seem to decide whether to fight the Nigerian federal government for control of the country or continue to focus its deadly hatred on the inhabitants of Christian villages in that nation.

Then there's the soft persecution of Christians in the oh-so-enlightened countries of Western Civilization — including the United States. They may not be cutting off our heads, but they are unmistakably shuffling Christians to the margins of society as secularization and the pursuit of unbridled pleasure take center stage. More and more, Christian ideals are being marginalized in western cultures where anything done with anybody is considered chic and permissible.

Much prayer is required, as well as backbone to stand up for our faith. As Satan rallies his forces against us (as he always has), we need to awaken from our self-imposed spiritual torpor and get to work (Matt. 28:18-20).

If we don't, it is going to get much darker in the days to come.

## 'Jesu Juva' on every page

**T**he great Yale University professor of church history, Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006), known for his massive *The Christian Tradition* and his editorship of the English translation of the works of Martin Luther, also wrote a small volume studying the relationship between the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and biblical doctrine.

Bach Among the Theologians appeared first in 1946 and represents Pelikan's devoted foray into the world of Bach scholarship. His work truly is a labor of love for both Bach and Bach's Lutheran heritage.

Patrick Kavanaugh, in his memorable *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*, explains Bach's connection to Luther:

"Bach spent his entire life in Germany, working primarily as a church musician. For the two centuries prior, this region had been permeated by the legacy of Martin Luther, with his radical emphasis on a living, personal, Bible-based Christianity. Luther himself had been a musician, declaring music to be second only to the Gospel itself. Bach was to be the reformer's greatest musical disciple."

In Pelikan's *Bach Among the Theologians*, he explains that Bach operated under the conviction that "the highest activity of the human spirit was the praise of God, but that such praise involved the total activity of the spirit."

In other words, as one of Bach's biographers summarizes, "Music is an act of worship with Bach... For him the tones do not perish, but ascend to God like praise too deep for utterance."

In a simple way, such consecration is seen in Bach's own hand. As he started each composition, he would mark "J.J." at the top of each page as an abbreviation for *Jesu Juva* or "Help me, Jesus."

Once he completed the work, Bach routinely concluded with the initials "S.D.G." representing *Soli Deo Gloria* or "To God alone, the glory."

As the seminary where I serve starts a new academic year, it occurred to me that Bach's approach to musical composition serves as a worthy model for the academic enterprise of theological education.



## Guest opinion with Jason Deusing

As faculty and students convene together to study and renew their minds (Romans 12:2), they should also grow in their love and worship of God with all their hearts (Matthew 22:37).

Bach rightly saw the eternal nature of all his work, and those preparing (and those teaching the ones preparing) for a future ministry should see their current academic pursuits not as a temporal means to an end but rather as something that will not perish and will be examined (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

For those of us embarking on a new term of study, Bach gives us all a fitting starting point — on our knees, confessing that apart from God alone we can do nothing (John 15:5), we state simply, *Jesu Juva*.

Then as the minutes, days, months, year(s) or degree program(s) conclude, we can pause to say *Soli Deo Gloria* with "praise too deep for utterance" for the faithful nearness of God's sanctifying work and presence in our minds and hearts.

As a new semester begins, let's welcome Bach among the theologians.

By way of personal testimony, the music of J.S. Bach served as my constant companion throughout my seminary studies and remains today as one of my favorite accompanists while working late into the night or early in the morning.

If you have yet to hear much of Bach, I recommend his *Mass in B Minor* as well as his *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*, particularly the version performed by Mstislav Rostropovich.

*Duesing is vice president for strategic initiatives and assistant professor of historical theology at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth.*

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**ANSWERING NEEDS** — Southern Baptist relief efforts are touching lives as an estimated two million refugees have fled Syria for neighboring countries. Southern Baptists are facilitating ongoing projects with Syrian refugees in four countries that are distributing food packets, hygiene kits, and temporary shelter. (BP photo courtesy of BGR)

## Southern Baptist relief having impact among Syrian refugees

**MIDDLE EAST (BP)** — At home in Syria, he was a lawyer. Today, he is a refugee in a neighboring country, looking for any type of work to support his wife and children and his nieces and nephews who had fled the country.

The 20 members of this family found their way to a makeshift refugee town, where 20 families had used feed sacks, plastic bags, cardboard — anything they could find — to create shelters. The community, now with 100 families, has found some vacant farm land and worked out an agreement with the owner to grow some food there.

"With more than five million people displaced, either outside or inside the country, the challenges continue to mount as to where to respond," said Jeff Palmer, executive director of Baptist Global Response (BGR).

"While there are some official sites and camps for refugees, the majority of those displaced are still in makeshift locations, such as with friends or families, or they are just finding anywhere relatively safe to lay their heads."

Palmer met the refugee lawyer just two days after the family had arrived from Syria. He was able to share an emergency food packet provided by Southern Baptists through Global Hunger

Relief (formerly the World Hunger Fund).

"The majority of Syrian refugees are women and children and a few older men," Palmer said. "Husbands, fathers, brothers and uncles stayed behind to protect their precious resources — unfortunately, many times in vain. They were so thankful for the small amount of help we gave them. We promised we would be back the following week with more."

An estimated two million refugees have fled Syria for neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. The prospect of Western powers entering the conflict has dramatically increased the outflow in recent days, Palmer noted.

"Our relief and development efforts among the refugees are into the second year," Palmer said. "To date, we have helped mobilize over \$750,000 in relief goods to this crisis — a small amount compared to the ongoing need, but we have been able to direct what we have to some key areas and through some key partners."

Working primarily through partners on the ground who can mobilize critically needed items to refugees as well as internally displaced persons, BGR is helping mainly in the area of emergency food packets, hygiene kits, basic shelter materials, and some

small amounts of medicines through ongoing projects with Syrian refugees in four countries, Palmer reported.

"Most of these are the distribution of food packets, hygiene kits and temporary shelter needs to sustain families who literally have walked away from pretty much everything they own," Palmer said. "All of them are done in the love and name of Christ to help these who have no one else to turn to."

In the face of such great need, it is hard to only be able to share a small amount, Palmer said. "I thought about the miracle of the fish and loaves. I wondered how God would multiply the small amount of food that each of them received. I then thought about the generous donors in my home country. Even though many gave small amounts, God had multiplied their gifts and blessed them so that so many this day were blessed."

"We ask continued prayer for wisdom and knowledge — to find the most effective and efficient places and people in need that we can help, to choose wisely. We also pray for continued safety and guidance for our partners who put so much at risk to respond, and we pray for peace — true peace — that can only come from above for all of those caught up in this terrible tragedy."

## Glorieta leaseholders file suit against SBC, others over sale details

**NASHVILLE (BP)** — The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), its executive committee, LifeWay Christian Resources, and a long list of trustees and staff members have been named in a lawsuit over the sale of the Glorieta Conference Center to a Christian ministry named Glorieta 2.0.

The lawsuit, filed by Kirk and Susie Tompkins of Little Rock, Ar., claims the Glorieta property, located east of Santa Fe, N.M., was not properly transferred from the executive committee to LifeWay after the executive committee received it from the Baptist Convention of New Mexico in 1950.

The Tompkins, who lease property at Glorieta, contend that the original 1950 warranty deed from the New Mexico convention remains the only deed on record in Santa Fe County, and no transfer of deed is recorded.

The lawsuit also appears to assert that LifeWay Christian Resources erred in approving the sale of the property to the Christian camping ministry Glorieta 2.0 in June because an affirmative vote by messengers to the SBC annual meeting is required for two consecutive years in order for a sale to commence.

D. August Boto, executive vice president and general counsel for the executive committee, said LifeWay owns Glorieta and explained that the only sale of property by an SBC entity which would require convention approval — in one meeting, not two — would be if the entity proposed to sell all or substantially all of its property.

"This sale does not rise to that level," Boto said.

In a statement released to Baptist Press Sept. 5, Boto said, "We see no legal basis for the proposition that Executive Committee or convention permission is required before LifeWay may dispose of the Glorieta property. We believe, therefore, that the case filed is without any legal merit, and that the court will concur."

Marty King, director of corporate communications for LifeWay, said in a statement, "We have proper deeds for all of Glorieta and are confident Southern Baptist Convention approval is not required for this transaction."

"LifeWay's bylaws do require approval for such action by our SBC-elected board of trustees, and, LifeWay's trustees approved disposition of the Glorieta property two years ago and the sale to Glorieta 2.0

for a Christian camping ministry earlier this year."

The Tompkins want the sale of Glorieta, which is set to be finalized this month, to be put on hold until the SBC can vote on it in 2014 and 2015.

Sixty-five churches, institutions, and individuals own structures on lots at Glorieta but do not own the land — a practice started in 1952 with 25-year non-renewable leases. Most of the current leases expire this fall and, if not renewed, require leaseholders to vacate the properties.

Glorieta 2.0 has given leaseholders several options:

- compensation based on the size of each structure, ranging from a minimum of \$40,000 to a maximum of \$100,000.

- a new 12-year lease.
- those who have been involved in ministry, including pastors and missionaries, can become permanent residents of Glorieta and stay on campus as long as they are physically able.

- donation of their homes to Glorieta 2.0 as a charitable contribution.

Leaseholders had until Sept. 1 to choose one of the options, and the vast majority of them did, according to Glorieta 2.0's executive director, Anthony Scott.

When LifeWay announced its trustees' approval to sell Glorieta, it emphasized that one of the most important requirements of the sale was "that the new owners provide options that are fair, reasonable and prudent for individuals and churches that lease land at Glorieta."

The lawsuit contends that the options available to leaseholders are not fair or reasonable and would cause irreparable harm. Kirk Tompkins told the Albuquerque Journal that language referring to many of the private Glorieta residences as "cabins" is misleading to LifeWay trustees and others who aren't familiar with the area. He said he pays insurance on his home setting its value at \$382,000.

LifeWay trustees, at their August meeting, voted to add 140 acres to the previously announced sale of Glorieta "to provide additional incentive for Glorieta 2.0 to increase compensation to those who have built cabins and made other improvements on leased property on the campus."

Those acres are not contiguous to the main property, and LifeWay had planned to market those properties separately.

I had spoken at a church on Sunday morning and left to get on my way to another engagement. I did not take the time to stop and eat lunch because I really needed to be on the road. Miles on down the highway, I pulled in at a convenience store to get a Diet Coke and a pack of nabs so I could just keep on going. When I went inside the store I saw this long, hot, serving counter with some good looking country cooking. There were peas, corn, okra and mash potatoes along with several other Southern fried foods that looked good, smelled good and I am fairly confident tasted really good. I stepped up to the cashier with my Coke and my package of nabs. I said, "That is some good looking food that you have got out here today." The lady cashier said, "It is good! You want me to get you a plate?" I said, "No Mam. This is my lunch." I pushed my selection up before her. She said, "This is your lunch?" I said, "Yes Mam!" She said, "I tell you right now that will not do anything but make your stomach get mad at you."

I laughed and gave her my money. She said, "I can still fix you a plate." I said, "I sure appreciate it, but I am going to have to pass." I left with her interesting and clever comment bouncing around in my head. "That will not do anything but make your stomach get mad at you." I ate my mini meal and a couple of hours later, I was still thinking about her prophetic words because her prophecy was coming true.

I really did not have the time to stop



## Just Enough to Make You Mad

and eat a big meal, and I am sure in the long-term I was better off just eating what I did. But I thought about how many of us partake of spiritual things in the same way that I nibbled on the physical food. There are times when we take in just a little bit of the good things of the Lord. We take just enough to make our spiritual appetites get mad at us. It is a little bit nourishing and far from being satisfying, but we keep on going.

You can see that taking place a number of times in the Bible as those people who were familiar with spiritual things often would talk to Jesus, engage Him in conversation and Q and A just enough to get a little more insight from Him and a tad more understanding about Him and His kingdom work. But they did not get

enough to transform their lives and bring them to fullness of joy, life and obedience.

You may recall that time when they were trying to corner Jesus and get Him to declare which was the greatest of all of the commandments. They thought that they had Him hemmed up when He told them, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37-40). He answered them and out maneuvered them, but instead of embracing that great insight, they wanted to argue the next step of the issue.

One scriptural lawyer demanded of Him, "Well, who is my neighbor?" Je-

sus responded to tell of a man who was taken down by thieves. He was beaten and left on the side of the road to die. It is the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus knew what they were trying to do and with incredible clarity, He side-stepped their attack and gave them even more understanding.

The tragedy is that they were receiving from Him great truths, but they were not acting in obedience upon those truths. They got just enough of Jesus and just enough of His amazing insight to irritate their spiritual appetites and not to solve anything. No doubt, the men who had discussed and wrangled over words and spiritual issues got just enough of Jesus' teachings not to solve their problems but to frustrate and anger them. Later, when Jesus was on the cross, one of the thieves hanging beside Him who was seeing his life ebb away wanted to taunt Jesus, attack Him and not believe in Him. He was close to the Lord, but all he wanted to do was to argue the issues with Him. He was close enough to be forgiven and enjoy the Lord's love. He was so close, but he left this life with his eternity empty.

All of us can do that and may have been guilty of doing that numerous times over dozens of different issues and needs in our lives. We get so close, but we do not cross the line of obedience to Him. We walk away with nothing except some spiritual hunger pains down the road.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbc-b.org.

## College News



Cora Joyce Davis, third from left, is shown with (left to right) her son, David C. Davis, Jerry Rankin, president emeritus of the International Mission Board and WCU trustee, and her daughter, Nan Davis, before the Dedication Ceremony for Davis Hall at WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY August 22. The women's residence hall was named for Cora Joyce and her late husband Ralph, alumni of Mississippi's Woman College (WCU's predecessor).

### In other College News:

► Mississippi College is hosting its Fall Preview Day Sept. 14. Open house at Providence Hill Farm, 11 a.m.; check in at Nelson Hall, 1 p.m., followed by speakers, class visitation, dinner on the Quad, and Choctaws football game. For more information, contact the admissions office at (601) 925-3800 or visit the Preview Day Page at [www.mc.edu](http://www.mc.edu).

► James Scater received the Mississippi College's Award of Excellence. Scater is a former professor and has penned more than 125 musical works performed across the United States and Europe. He retired from the school faculty in 2010 after more than 40 years of service as a professor.



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TVWS XSOYARYYYOY.

ZRSD OEOUOC: XKOCXT-PGUO

Clue: A = P

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Romans 2:12

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005



# Atrocities mount as terrorists strike Central African Republic

**BANGUI, Central African Republic (BP)** — Christians in the violence-ridden Central African Republic (CAR) are enduring atrocities under the country's rebel government, whose leader reportedly seeks to turn the country into an Islamic state.

Home to roughly five million people and slightly smaller than Texas, the Central African Republic is just west of Sudan and South Sudan, and was already one of Africa's least developed countries.

It has a history of political instability. On March 24, a coalition of rebels known as Seleka took the capital, Bangui, and sent then-President Francois Bozize into exile in Cameroon.

The new government, as described by reports in persecution monitor Morning Star News, is filled with Islamists whose troops have embarked on a spree of rape, murder, theft, and general violence against Christians, who make up a majority of the population.

"It is clear, according to our research, that it is Christians who have been suffering under Seleka rule and Muslims have been profiting," Lewis Mudge of Human Rights Watch told Morning Star News in an email, adding that Seleka agents "have not hesitated to attack Christian places of worship."

Nicolas Guerekoyame is the

leader of the country's Evangelical Alliance, part of the National Transitional Council created to act in place of the former parliament. According to Morning Star News, he wrote a letter on May 10 to Michel Djotodia, Seleka's leader, decrying the treatment of Christians.

"The various atrocities that preceded, accompanied and followed Seleka's rise to power have been specifically aimed at the Christian population," Guerekoyame wrote in the letter, which also was signed by Evangelical Alliance leaders Michel Gbégbe and Anatole Banga. "Churches and Christian institutions have been desecrated and plundered, priests and pastors have been assaulted and nuns raped."

Guerekoyame was briefly arrested Aug. 6 for criticizing the government at his church, even though his position with the National Transitional Council granted him immunity. He was released later in the day.

Fears of sharia, or Islamic law, coming to the Central African Republic mounted when a copy of a confidential letter surfaced that was reportedly written by Djotodia to the Saudi Arabia-based Organization of Islamic Conference in 2012, asking for help overthrowing Bozize's government.

"God willing and we come to Bangui; we will put in place a

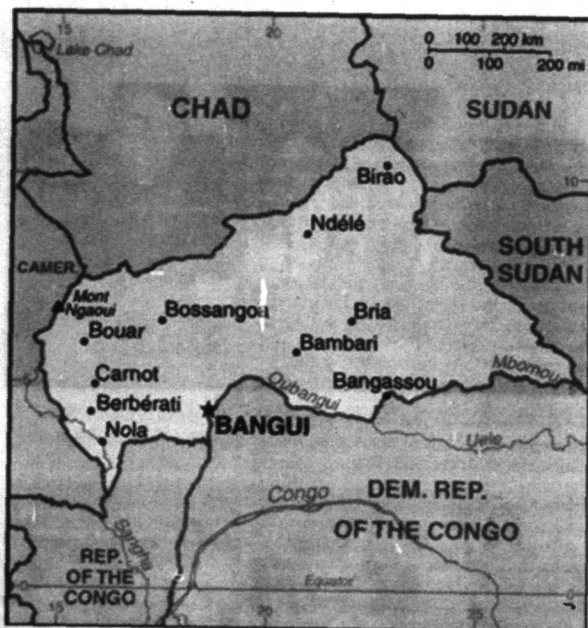
regime to apply Islamic sharia law," the letter read, a copy of which was obtained by Morning Star. "Even if we fail to hunt Bozize, we will transform a part of the Central African Republic, Chad and Darfur into a new Islamic Republic."

The letter, which Djotodia denies writing, also indicated that taking power in the Central African Republic was not the end of his aims. However, he allegedly wrote in the letter, "After our victory, we will also help [Islamists] take power in Chad. We need your support, brothers. It should help us in material, money and homes. We agree that your items come to fight on our side."

The World Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission (WEA-RLC) released a statement Aug. 19 highlighting the danger to Christians in the Central African Republic, relaying a report from the Catholic group Aid to Church in Need about an Islamist militia attack against 14 Christian villages.

The attack killed 15 people and left more than 1,000 homeless. Witnesses said militants threw bodies into a river, including the corpse of a five-month-old baby.

"These incidents highlight targeting of Christians and breakdown of law and order in the country," Godfrey Yagarajah, executive director of WEA-RLC, said in the statement.



A United Nations panel said in August that the rule of law is "almost non-existent" and noted the many atrocities carried out in the Central African Republic as well as general insecurity.

Mudge of Human Rights Watch told Morning Star that CAR's humanitarian crisis "verges on catastrophe," with Seleka fighters still looting neighborhoods in the capital and rampaging through provincial villages. "Because of a lack of security, humanitarian actors cannot access the most

vulnerable; people continue to die in the bush due to disease, exposure and malnutrition."

Djotodia has claimed people outside his control are committing the atrocities, but Bishop Albert Vanbuel, president of the Catholic Bishops Justice and Peace Commission, denounced the Seleka government in a May 5 statement as "a rebellion of religious extremism with evil intentions, characterized by profanation and planned destruction of religious buildings, especially Catholic and Protestant churches."

## Sec. of State issues appeal for release of Americans



ABEDINI

"...This statement from America's top diplomat reaffirms that despite the devastating legal decision in Iran, the fight for Pastor Saeed's freedom is far from over. It is a critical time to reengage Iran, to use all diplomatic avenues to secure his release."

**Jordan Sekulow**  
executive director of  
the American Center  
for Law and Justice

**WASHINGTON (BP)** — With a new president in Iran vowing to improve international relations, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Aug. 28 called on Iran to release Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American pastor held captive for his faith.

"The United States respectfully asks the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to work cooperatively with us in our efforts to help U.S. citizens Robert Levinson, Amir Hekmati, and Saeed Abedini to return to their families after lengthy detentions," Kerry said in a statement.

Levinson went missing in Iran in 2007 and Hekmati has been detained on espionage charges for two years. Abedini was arrested last September and sentenced to eight years in prison, with a Tehran court days ago denying his appeal.

Kerry noted that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who was elected in June to succeed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "has shared in his speeches and interviews over the past few months his hope and vision to improve the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran's relationship with the world."

"We urge the Iranian Government to release Mr. Hekmati and Mr. Abedini and to help us locate Mr. Levinson so that they may be reunited with their families as safely and as soon as possible," Kerry said. "These men belong at home with those who love and miss them."

The statement marks the second time

Kerry has spoken on behalf of Abedini. In a statement in March, Kerry said he was "deeply concerned" about the pastor and was "disturbed by reports" that he was suffering physical and psychological abuse in prison.

Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice, a key advocate for Abedini's release, described Kerry's statement as an important diplomatic step in the effort for Abedini's freedom.

"We welcome this renewed involvement and effort initiated by Secretary Kerry to bring Pastor Saeed — a U.S. citizen imprisoned for his faith — back home to his wife and young children," Sekulow said.

"...This statement from America's top diplomat reaffirms that despite the devastating legal decision in Iran, the fight for Pastor Saeed's freedom is far from over. It is a critical time to reengage Iran, to use all diplomatic avenues to secure his release," Sekulow said.

Abedini's wife, Idaho resident Naghme Abedini, said Aug. 29 she is thankful for Kerry's statement but "I still expect my president, President Obama, who has remained silent thus far, to speak out on this very critical human rights issue and let the Iranian government and the world know that religious freedom is still a top priority for our government."

"President Obama must demonstrate that America will not stay silent in the face of religious persecution, nor will it let an American citizen waste away in an Iranian prison simply because he chose to follow Jesus."

Abedini was sentenced in January for threatening "national security," which is a catch-all phrase often used by Iranian courts to imprison converts from Islam for various sorts of evangelistic activities.

Upon his arrest, Abedini was taken to Evin Prison in Tehran, known for its particularly harsh treatment of prisoners. During his months in prison, the pastor has been placed in solitary confinement at least twice and has endured repeated beatings by prison officials who have attempted to force him to recant his faith in Jesus.

For months, he was denied medical treatment for internal bleeding caused by the beatings.

Abedini's response, he wrote in an earlier letter, is Romans 8:35-39, which says persecution and death cannot separate a believer from Christ.

"The reality of Christian living is that difficulties or problems do arise in our lives," Abedini wrote. "Persecution and difficulties are not new occurrences, but are seen often in the Christian life. It is through the suffering and tribulations that we are to enter the Kingdom of God."

Prayer vigils for the pastor are being planned worldwide for Sept. 26 to mark one year since his arrest, to call attention to his plight, and to intercede on his behalf. More information about the vigils can be found at SaveSaeed.org, where more than 600,000 people have signed a petition for his release.

## Just for the Record



**STRONGHOPE CHURCH, WESSON**, honored Cleonae Reid for 50 years of volunteer service as music director. Shown are Don Cagle, Reid, and Robin Risher.



Students from **POPLAR SPRINGS CHURCH, MENDENHALL**, recently attended Student Life camp in Ruston, La.



**CLARKE ASSOCIATION** recognized the pastors and ministers of music born in the 1920's and 30's in the association for their service during a luncheon.



**YELLOW LEAF CHURCH, OXFORD**, licensed Tracy Gray to the ministry. Shown are Gray, Heather Gray, Riley Gray, Kaylee Gray, and pastor Jerry East.

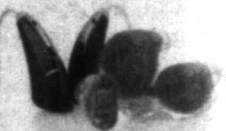
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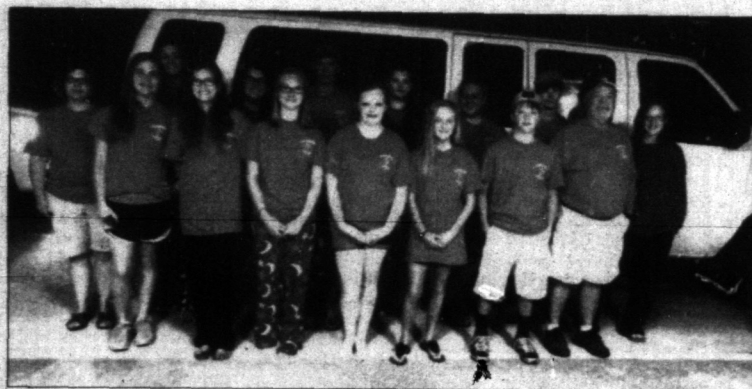
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## Just for the Record

Fifteen students and leaders from **CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, attended M-Fuge in Nashville, Tenn., participating in Bible study, mission work, and fellowship.



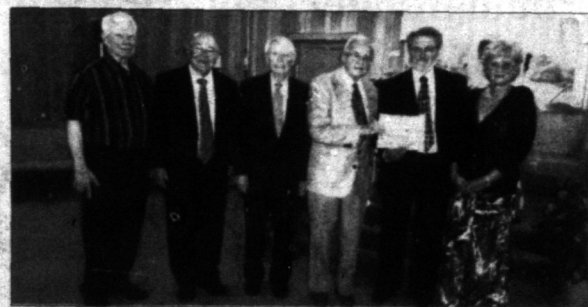
Members of **CROSS ROADS CHURCH, PELAHATCHIE**, are shown delivering 300 encouragement bags to the Hederman Cancer Center, Jackson, for all new patients.



**WEST HEIGHTS CHURCH, PONTOTOC**, held a deacon ordination Sept. 1. Shown are pastor David Hamilton, Benjamin and Cassie Hamilton, Scott and Jennifer Dodson, and John and Chrissy Suggs.

### In other Church News:

► The Mississippi Baptist Chaplains' Association will meet Sept. 20, 8:15 a.m., in the Skyroom of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, Jackson. Guest speaker is Richard Sale, consultant for Chaplain Ministries for the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Sale will address the subject of ministry fatigue and give information regarding NAMB endorsement. Cost is \$10 for lunch.



**ANTIOCH CHURCH, QUITMAN**, ordained James W. (Bill) Avera, Jr., as a deacon Sept. 1. Shown are Curtis Graham, John Edwards, Grady Crowell, Billy Whitaker, Avera, and Paula Avera.

Children from **POPLAR SPRINGS CHURCH, MENDENHALL**, recently attended Children's Camp at Central Hills Baptist Retreat.



The GAs of **CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO**, held a recognition service for the girls to receive their badges earned earlier this year. Shirley Allen and Pam Wallace, leaders; Hal Hatten, pastor.



The WMU ladies of **IMMANUEL CHURCH, GREENWOOD**, recently sewed 47 pillowcase dresses that were taken by a mission team to Malaysia Aug. 14. Student Christian Robertson is shown with the dresses.



The RAs and GAs of **CALVARY CHURCH, VICKSBURG**, held a "Christmas in August" mission.



Don Williams, **CROSSVIEW CHURCH, RANKIN ASSOCIATION**, and Gene Theriot, **MEADOW GROVE CHURCH, RANKIN ASSOCIATION**, are shown teaching classes during an East Asia mission trip recently.



ELAINE AND JONATHAN HUGUENIN

## Photographers who refused lesbian ceremony lose case

**ALBUQUERQUE (BP)** — An attack on religious liberty is evident in the New Mexico Supreme Court's ruling that two Christian photographers violated the state's Human Rights Act by refusing to photograph a same-sex "commitment ceremony," according to several Southern Baptist commentators.

"Anyone who still doubts that the normalization of homosexuality and the legalization of same sex marriage will represent a seismic shift in the culture at large needs only to look to New Mexico to see that nothing less than religious liberty is now under threat — and in a big way," R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., wrote in an online column Aug. 26.

Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville, said the Aug. 22 ruling "demonstrates, once again, that where we are headed is the state-established religion of sexual liberation, with the law used to steamroll every conscience in the way."

Elaine and Jonathan Huguenin, owners of Elane Photography, were asked in 2006 by Vanessa Willock to photograph her same sex "commitment ceremony" in the town of Taos. The Huguenins, citing their Christian belief that marriage should be only between a man and woman, declined the request along with a subsequent request by Willock's partner.

Mohler described the Huguenins as Christians "who believe that marriage is exclusively the union of a man and a woman. They further believe that they are responsible and faithful only if they avoid any explicit or implied endorsement of same-sex marriage."

Willock found another photographer at a lower price but filed a complaint with the New Mexico Human Rights Commission, accusing Elane Photography of discrimination based on her sexual orientation. The Huguenins were found guilty and ordered to pay hefty fines.

According to state Supreme Court Justice Richard Boson, the Constitution protects the rights of the Christian photographers to pray to the God of their choice and follow religious teachings, but he noted that belief and practice are not the same things.

Religious liberty, Boson wrote, must be subordinated to the state's anti-discrimination laws, and that the photographers — and by extension others — are "compelled by law to compromise the very religious beliefs that inspire their lives."

"The Huguenins today can no more turn away customers on the basis of their sexual orientation — photographing a same sex marriage ceremony — than they could refuse to photograph African Americans or Muslims," Boson wrote.

"The Huguenins have to channel their conduct, not their beliefs, so as to leave space for other Americans who believe something different. That compromise is part of the glue that holds us together as a nation, the tolerance that lubricates the varied moving parts of us as a people."

Compromising religious beliefs is "a price... we all have to pay somewhere in our civic life," Boson wrote.

Mohler described Boson's legal opinion as a blatant error in the traditional understanding of religious liberty, upheld in other cases before other state courts and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Instead, he said, the ruling "points to the comprehensive scope of the moral and legal realignment required by same-sex marriage — and eagerly demanded by its proponents. The addition of sexual orientation as a denominator of a protected class was sufficient to drag the Huguenins before a court in a state that itself does not legally recognize same-sex marriage."

"The New Mexico Supreme Court has now made clear that the price to be paid by many is the forfeiture of their religious liberty," Mohler wrote.

## Nation's largest private employer to offer same sex partner benefits

**BENTONVILLE, Ark. (BP)** — Walmart will offer health benefits for married and unmarried same sex partners of all full-time employees in the United States starting in January, the nation's largest private employer has announced.

Walmart spokesman Randy Hargrove defined same-sex couples as those "living together in an ongoing, exclusive, committed relationship — similar to marriage — for at least 12 months," according to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in Little Rock.

Though the company expects couples to continue to share a household indefinitely, the newspaper reported, Hargrove said Walmart will not require proof. The coverage also will include heterosexual couples in similar relationships.

"Naturally, [we're] disappointed," said Tim Wildmon, president of the American Family Association in Tupelo. "It validates a lifestyle which we think corporate America should discourage rather than promote."

As of press time, Baptist Press had sought other comments from pro-family sources but had not received any and had seen very little in the media.

Observers expected the move, announced via postcards sent to employees Aug. 26, to impact other employers.

A company Walmart's size, especially with its fairly conservative image, I think it sends a pretty strong signal that if Walmart is offering benefits to same-sex partners, maybe some other companies that have been hanging back will follow Walmart's lead," Alan Ellstrand, a professor in the University of Arkansas'

Sam M. Walton College of Business in Fayetteville, told the Democrat-Gazette.

Hargrove said the change is in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling against Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act in June, which cleared the way for same-sex couples legally married in their own states to receive federal benefits.

Rather than have a different set of standards for employees in states where same sex marriage is legal, Walmart "thought it was important to develop a single definition for all Walmart associates in the U.S. to give them consistency in the various markets we operate in across the country," Hargrove said.

The Wall Street Journal said Walmart previously had offered benefits to domestic partners of employees in states that required the company to do so by law. The Journal also indicated that Walmart had been under pressure from homosexual advocacy groups to expand coverage.

With 1.3 million workers, Walmart is the nation's largest employer besides the federal government. Half of its employees are enrolled in its health care plans, but the company said it does not know how many will take advantage of the new options.

Chad Griffin, president of the pro-homosexual Human Rights Campaign, told USA Today he worked at Walmart as a teenager and now celebrates the company's "historic action."

Walmart "has sent a cultural signal that equality for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is the simplest of mainstream values, and we look forward to continuing

to work with them," Griffin said. Research by the Human Rights Campaign shows 62% of Fortune 500 companies already offer domestic partner benefits, USA Today reported.

Hargrove said the move to include coverage for same-sex domestic partners is "one piece" of the company's updated benefits package, which also includes a new vision plan and 100% coverage for some surgeries.


Forbes quoted a leaked internal memo obtained by a homosexual news blog in which Sally Welborn, Walmart's senior vice president of benefits, told managers the change was a "business decision, not a moral or political decision."

"Given the diverse world we live in today, a comprehensive benefits package that includes domestic partner benefits appeals to the contemporary workforce," Welborn wrote. "Many companies, including most of our competitors, already offer spouse/partner benefits to their employees."

Welborn cited the Publix grocery store chain as one competitor that does not offer such benefits.

"I honestly thought this would never happen," Wayne Bell, whose same-sex spouse Daniel Bonner works for Walmart, told the Democrat-Gazette. "Walmart has always seemed to me like a right wing company, so this is a big surprise to me."


Ellstrand, the University of Arkansas business professor, told the newspaper, "Often, Walmart has to make decisions that are not only motivated by what makes most economic sense, but also what might be perceived as building the image of Walmart."



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## Revivals & Homecomings

► **Ackerman Church, Ackerman:** Revival, Sept. 15 - 18; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Wade Stevens, speaker; Josh Buford, music.

► **Harmony Church, Lincoln County:** Revival, Sept. 15 - 18; Sun., 11 a.m., Walt Grayson, speaker; Sun., 6 p.m. and Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Jeff Davis, speaker; Aaron Walker, worship leader; Owen King, pastor.

► **Hebron Church, Grenada:** Revival, Sept. 15 - 18; 7 p.m. nightly; Dan Robertson, Cary Worthington, Michael Lee, and Paul Blanchard, speakers; Leslie Reeves, music.

► **Belle Fountain Church, Ocean Springs:** Revival, Sept. 15 - 18; Sun., 10:45 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Walton Douglas, speaker; Damon Westfall, worship leader; Larry Darden, pastor.

► **Union Chapel Church, Cagle's Crossing, North Delta Association:** 75th anniversary, Sept. 14, 10 a.m., including fellowship, music, and potluck dinner on the grounds; revival, Sept. 15

- 18; Sun., 9 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. nightly; Edd Lawrence, speaker; Dan Sandlin, pastor.

► **Chunky Church, Chunky:** Revival, Sept. 15 - 18; Sun., 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. nightly; Jim Hill, speaker; Gary Thorne, music.

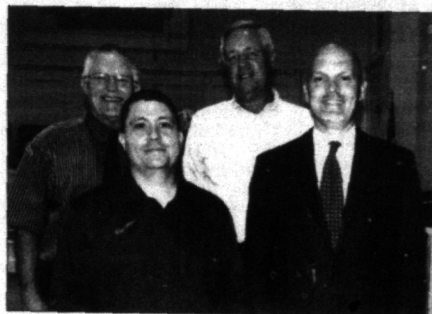
► **Tuscola Church, Tuscola:** Revival, Sept. 15 - 18; Sun., 11 a.m., followed by fellowship lunch and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Eddie Hamilton, speaker; Amelia Langford, music; T. J. Bates, pastor.

► **Hope Church, Philadelphia:** One-day revival; Sept. 15 and 29, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Dan Howard and Tommy Anderson, speakers; homecoming, Sept. 22, 10:30 a.m. followed by potluck lunch; Brian Weir, speaker.

► **Elon Church, Macon:** Homecoming, Sept. 15; services, 11 a.m., followed by lunch; Danny Cheatham, speaker; Steve and Becky Carver, music.

► **New Providence Church, Carthage:** Homecoming, Sept. 15; services, 10 a.m., followed by lunch; Rick White, speaker; Corey Bell, pastor.

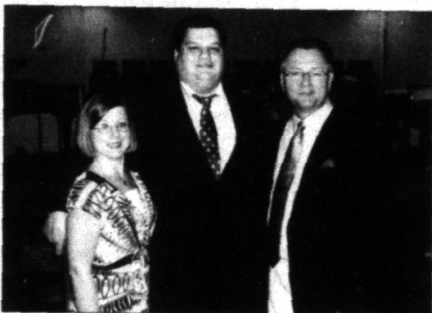
## Just for the Record



**CALVARY CHURCH, HATTIESBURG,** ordained Steven Hudson as deacon Sept. 1. Shown are Phillip Nobles, Hudson, Jody Hasty and pastor Jeff Floyd.



The children of **CALVARY CHURCH, VICKSBURG,** are shown with their BELIEVE bucket. The children collected funds for buildings and grounds.



**BELDEN CHURCH, BELDEN,** recently ordained Joe Cash as deacon. Shown are Bridgette Cash, Cash, and pastor Jim Holcomb.



**FLOWOOD CHURCH, FLOWOOD,** ordained Ford Jones as deacon. Shown are Jerry Tuner and Jones.

## MS POSITIONS

**GALLMAN BAPTIST CHURCH IN GALLMAN, MS IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER** to lead Sunday and Wednesday Worship activities. Please send resumes to gbcsearchcommittee@outlook.com.

**ARLINGTON HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH OF PASCAGOULA, MISSISSIPPI IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC.** Send resumes to Arlington Heights Baptist Church Attention Search Committee 3819 Arlington St., Pascagoula, MS 39581 or email to Arlington\_church@bellsouth.net

**MINISTER OF MUSIC, PART-TIME POSITION.** Please send resume to: Music Committee C/O Eighth Avenue Baptist Church, 801 C St, Meridian, MS 39301.

**BI-VOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER.** **WILDWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH IN CLINTON, MS.** Please mail resume to Wildwood Baptist Church, 101 Auburn Dr., Clinton, MS 39056 or email to wwbc@comcast.net.

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**CHUNKY CHURCH, CHUNKY,** held a deacon ordination for Lance Dean and Chris Massey Sept. 1. Shown are Dean, pastor Matt Pittman, and Massey.



**HARPERVILLE CHURCH, HARPERVILLE,** recently licensed Jason Tillman to the ministry. Tillman serves as the church's student minister. He is shown with his wife Joni and pastor Bobby McKay.



**FIRST CHURCH, NICHOLSON,** ordained Zack Malley to the ministry Aug. 25. Shown, back row, are AMD Carl Myers, Sarah Malley, Malley, and Charles O'Cherry; front row, Aiden Malley and Rilie Malley.



Members of **GRACE CHURCH, VICKSBURG,** attended an open house, Aug. 18 which was given to the church by the late Sam Wright. Pastor Bryan Abel is seen accepting the keys to the house from Frank Wright.

## CLOSINGS

cont. from p. 1

shows that my life has indeed come full circle."

Since her conversion from abortion clinic director to pro-life advocate, Johnson has started a ministry to help workers leave the abortion industry. She has pledged to "fight until every abortion clinic in this country has shut its doors."

The last abortion clinic in Mississippi, Jackson Women's Health Organization on North State Street in Jackson, has filed a federal lawsuit rather than abide by increased regulations mandated in recent years by the state's legislature. A federal judge in Jackson has stayed implementation of the new regulations until hearings can proceed.

The owner of the Jackson clinic, Diane Derzis, was recently hauled into court in Alabama for operating an unlicensed abortion clinic in Birmingham, after a 76-page violations report by Alabama health authorities forced the closure of her licensed abortion clinic.

Alabama health authorities became involved after three ambulances were called to the Birmingham clinic in a short space of time. An ambulance was recently photographed loading a patient at the scene of Derzis' Jackson clinic.

This year, 42 clinics that provided surgical abortions have shut their doors and two that offered chemical abortions by drugs also have closed, according to Operation Rescue, which monitors closings and health and safety violations by clinics nationwide.

That number far surpasses the 25 surgical clinics shut-

down last year and the 30 in 2011, by Operation Rescue's count. While others estimate a smaller number of closings, the pattern is clear.

Some of the shutdowns have been of major clinics. For instance, Virginia's No. 1 abortion provider closed. The Washington Post reported in July. NOVA Women's Health-care in Fairfax, Va., shut down after state and local governments enacted regulations the abortion provider appeared unable to meet.

The northern Virginia clinic performed 3,066 abortions in 2012 and 3,567 in 2011.

The reasons given for the upswing in closings are varied even among pro-lifers, including:

- increasing state regulation and oversight of clinics.
- growth in pro-life opinion and activity.
- a decline in the abortion rate.

In some cases, clinics have shut down when abortion doctors retired or were no longer licensed.

State legislatures enacted 69 pro-life laws this year, according to a report released Sept. 5 by Americans United for Life (AUL). In all, 48 states considered about 360 such proposals in 2013, AUL reported.

The legislative action this year continued a recent trend in states. Seventy "life-affirming measures" became law in 2011 and 38 in 2012, according to AUL.

While pro-lifers assert the laws are for the protection of women, abortion rights advocates argue their purpose is to stop abortion. Regardless, the result appears to be abortion clinics are being held accountable in ways they have not been previously.

## ATTACK

cont. from p. 1

doing bad things to each other," Heimbach said in comments provided to Baptist Press.

"No one is attacking or threatening to attack the United States or any ally of the United States. In fact, should the U.S. go to war with Syria it will vastly increase the risk of Syrian attack on U.S. allies in the region," said Heimbach, who was instrumental in developing President George H.W. Bush's just war ethic for the 1991 Gulf War when he served as deputy executive secretary of the Domestic Policy Council.

Heimbach noted, "The meaning and interpretation of a just cause for war (in a just war ethic) requires the nation being attacked (Syria) to have done, or to be doing, or to be moving toward doing some terrible wrong toward the attacking nation (United States) — not merely doing something bad within their own borders against their own people."

The Christian just war ethic referenced by Heimbach dates to the days of the fourth-century bishop Augustine of Hippo. Faced with Barbarian invasions, Augustine developed criteria for the participation of Christians in warfare.

The theory was developed through the early 20th century and now includes the ideas that wars must:

- have a just cause.
- be declared by a lawful authority as a response to an imminent threat.
- be a last resort.
- be prosecuted according to principles of propor-

tionality and non-combatant immunity.

■ have a reasonable probability of success.

"I do not see, from President Obama, a reasonable opportunity to prevail," Moore said in the RNS article compiled by culture writer Jonathan Merritt, "or even a definition of what prevailing would mean."

"Regime change is not the point of this action, and even if it were, we don't yet know who the good guys are. Replacing one set of terrorists with another does not bring about justice or peace."

"I agree with the President on the moral urgency of Syria and I morally reject the crypto-isolationist voices that tell us, in every era, to tend to 'America First' and leave defenseless people around the world on their own."

"In this case, though, the administration is demonstrating neither an imminent threat to national security nor a feasible means to alleviate the very real human rights crisis in Syria."

The debate over a military strike on Syria stems from a

gas attack when an estimated 1,400 civilians died Aug. 21 in a rebel-held area. Obama said in a White House press briefing that military intelligence had linked the Assad regime to the attack.

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1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

## Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

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## Authority Acknowledged • John 2:1-16

What does power look like? For some, it may be the image of a well-dressed surgeon or attorney. For others, it could be the billionaire C.E.O. of a Fortune 500 company. Some would look to their local politician for an example. How about inside the walls of a church building? If I were to visit your worship services this Sunday, who would I label as "powerful?" Power and authority are often avenues for people to abuse or manipulate others around them. Occasionally, someone feels the need to "flex their muscles," so to speak and remind people around them of their power or influence. The late Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, provides a keen insight on power. Concerning the issue, Thatcher had the following to say, "Power is like being a lady...if you have to tell people you are, you aren't."

We meet up with Jesus early in His earthly ministry in this week's study and learn what real power and authority are all about. As you meditate on the first 12 verses of John 2 you will quickly realize that you are reading the account of Christ's first miracle. Commonly referred to as "turning the water into wine," I am afraid the only occasions we may hear of this miracle is a passing reference at wedding ceremonies. No doubt weddings are important, and we can take note of the fact Jesus chose to perform His initial

miracle at a wedding. However, there is much more beneath the surface than just the locale of the miracle.

### Obedience (2:1-5)

There is a problem at this wedding. The guests are out of wine! This was an embarrassment to the host and cause for those attending to think less than flattering thoughts about the ceremony. Today, we are accustomed to a wedding ceremony and reception being completed within a couple of hours. For the Jewish people in this story, they were used to a wedding celebration lasting up to a week. To run out of wine was actual grounds for the bride's family to sue the groom. They obviously took their weddings seriously. Among all this concern, something else was becoming apparent.

By this time Mary, the mother of Jesus, has made known to Him the situation. His reply of, "Woman," was a term of endearment not contempt. His mother had the faith to realize

that if others would simply obey her Son, they would have the opportunity to experience a blessing. Her testimonial, "Whatever He says to you, do it," is one of the most awesome confessions of faith in all of the Scripture. Her instructions to obey should be a constant reminder for each of us. Simple obedience reaps great results.

### Opportunity (2:6-11)

These six verses convey two primary areas of importance. One, it signified the beginning of Christ's miracles and signs. The wine was the best the

guests had drunk throughout the wedding celebration, but that is not of primary significance. What is most important is the opportunity it gave Jesus to exercise His authority given to Him by the Heavenly Father. Remember, Jesus' disciples witnessed this miracle and it afforded them the opportunity to grow in their faith. How about us? When Jesus does something amazing in our lives, are we quick to grow in our belief?



Explore the Bible  
with Bobby McKay

### Ownership (2:12-16)

Remaining space does not permit me to share all of the issues I would like to about this passage, but it is powerful. It is the account of Christ cleansing the temple. We can read in Scripture, Jesus cleansed the temple on at least two occasions. In one of His greatest exhibitions of authority, Jesus crafted a scourge of cords (what we would call a whip today) and drove out the money changers and the animals. He also overturned their tables and poured out their coins used in their dirty business practices.

This great example of Christ's authority and power is to be taken seriously. His righteous anger burned against those that would blaspheme a place of worship. They had turned a holy place into a place where others were taken advantage of and leaders were in the business of personal profit and commerce. How about us? Whose power and authority are most evident in our places of worship? If it is anyone other than Jesus, we must repent and appeal to His authority as Lord. We may fill the seats on Sunday, but He owns the church! He is mighty to save and forgive. I pray you will encounter His power as you worship and serve Him daily.

McKay is pastor of Harperville Church, Harperville.

## The Pressure of Partiality • James 2:1-13

James makes it clear that favoritism toward anyone is sin. Don't confuse favoritism and friendships, for friendships carve out their own levels. Jesus made no bones about that. He had the multitudes that he cared about, and then he had 12 chosen followers. Then there were the three, Peter, James, and John, who were selected for the trip to the Mount of Transfiguration as well as into the garden of Gethsemane. Additionally, there was "the" disciple Jesus loved the most, John. If we glorify men, we are failing to glorify God, so handle the favoritism properly.

In v. 2-3 James illustrates the point. If a rich person enters your synagogue with gold rings and splendid clothes, and a poor man enters in shabby clothing (both being judged by appearance) James says we can't say to the well dressed, "sit here on this good seat" and to the poor man, "stand there, or sit on the floor." That makes us guilty of obsequious favoritism. Don't court the rich for the sake of advantage. You have now judged with evil thoughts and ulterior motives. Favoritism for one cannot but lead to the detriment of others.

Choose those with the greatest ad-

vantage to promoting the kingdom of God. We choose not because of some character traits that enamors us, or through which we think we might impress others with our choice. You diminish and hurt Christ's purpose and work by this misrepresentation. God is above such things. Matthew Henry's Commentary on Lev. 19:18 says we are required to put off all malice and put on brotherly love. Malice begins thoughts of murder. We are to forgive and forget, for we are thus forgiven by God. Indeed, we are to love our neighbor better than ourselves. Practicing moral laws does not make us weak. Never think that God coerces us. James concludes that when we deliberately choose to obey Him, then He helps us with deliberation.

Forever bear in mind that obedience doesn't bring you to God, but it is only through the death and sacri-

fice of Jesus Christ which does. God doesn't side with those with position and/or wealth. Favoritism toward those known to be influential oftentimes turns out to be worthless, costly and foolish. The non-Christian factor in America often honors those who openly despise God, for they believe it to be the prevailing opinion.

In Ch. 2:8-13 James disc

usses love, law and motive. Scripture says you must love your neighbor as yourself, and you will do well.

By showing favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as a transgressor. In v. 9 he warned "be sure your motive is proper or you will be committing sin." Let's conclude that sin is breaking God's laws, not some mere alienation or just a relationship with flaws. Sin is not doing that which God commands.

In vss. 10 & 11 James talks about

stumbling on one point of the law and thus becoming guilty of all. Break one of 1,000 links in a chain and the chain has lost its strength. We come to see that all sin is alike in relationship to God. Can we think that our good deeds atone for our bad deeds? James says not. All obedience must be done with an eye to the will of God. The gospel is law. Christ is King to rule us, a prophet to teach us, and priest to intercede for us. These Christian principles can absolutely transform our society.

James calls himself a "servant of Jesus Christ" and shows us what everyday religion should be like. He is practical and plain spoken, easily understood, constantly exalts the faith and refrains from referring to his earthly relationship to Jesus. This enhances his testimony. His life work was to win the Jewish people to a solid belief in Jesus as their Messiah. In the beatitudes, we are promised to be blessed with mercy when we have been merciful to others. V. 13 states that mercy trumps justice. Judgment will be without mercy to those who don't show mercy.

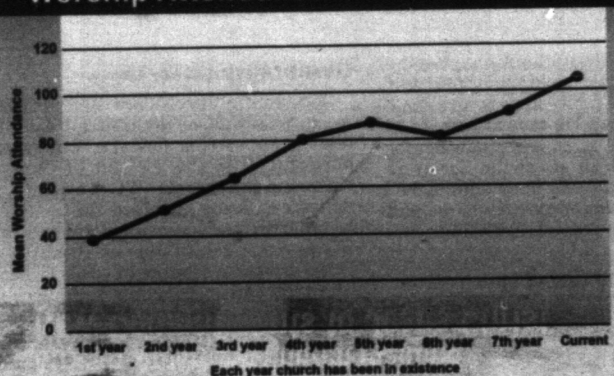
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### Bible Studies for Life with Evelyn Gibson



# African American church plants show signs of success

## African-American Church Planting Worship Attendance

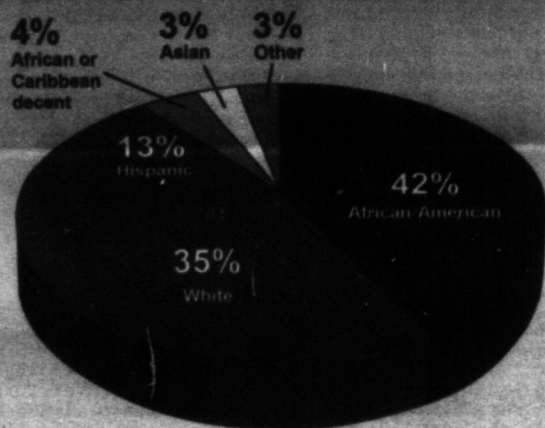


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## African-American Church Planting

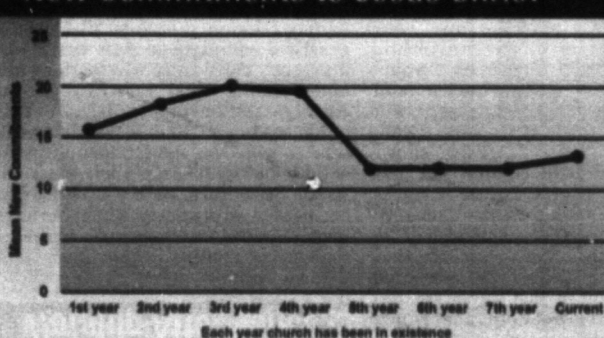
In the community where the church started what percentage of people were in the following ethnic groups?



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## African-American Church Planting New Commitments to Jesus Christ



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**NASHVILLE (BP)** — A steady increase in attendance has been the overall trend among African American churches planted prior to 2012, LifeWay Research learned from "the first research project of its size and scope to measure characteristics distinctive to the African American context," as researchers described it.

The average first-year Sunday attendance of 37 doubled by the fourth year among the 290 African American church plants in the multi-denominational survey aimed at identifying characteristics of healthy new congregations.

Worship attendance, new commitments to Christ, community demographics, church culture, facility usage, promotion and outreach, and church sponsorship and funding were studied in the project.

"This research has described in detail African American church planting today," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. "More importantly, this research has begun productive conversations among church planting leaders across the U.S. about how best to train and equip new African American church plants."

Stetzer added that large national studies on church planting have been conducted in the past, "but it would be wrong to assume that national factors are the same for every sub-population of church plants."

### Worship attendance

The survey identified three characteristics that had the most positive impact on worship attendance, which were present in more than two-thirds of the churches:

- delegation of leadership roles to volunteers.
- leadership training for new church members.
- a plan of personal spiritual formation for the church planter.

The study found worship style impacts attendance. The most common worship style used by African American church plants was blended, cited by 45% of those surveyed, followed by contemporary gospel, contemporary, and urban contemporary, ranging from 12-14%.

However, church plants with a more distinctive style — urban contemporary for instance — had higher attendance than churches using a blended style.

### New commitments

The average number of new commitments to Christ for the first year of a church plant was 16, LifeWay Research found. The average number of new commitments peaked in year three at 20 and then remained at 12 or higher for the remainder of the years measured.

The study identified two characteristics that stood out as having a positive impact on new commitments to Christ and were present among more than two-thirds of the churches: door-to-door evangelism (75%) and the establishment of a new member class (68%).

Six characteristics were shown to impact both worship attendance and new commitments to Jesus Christ:

- Church planter compensated for their work (52% of the new churches).
- Weeklong boot camp or basic training provided for the church planter (42%).
- Church planter worked 60 hours a week or more on the church plant during the first two years of existence (39%).
- A sponsor or mother church permitted the plant to meet in the sponsoring church building (32%).
- The plants had their own facilities during the first five years (20%).
- The church plant incorporated a contemporary worship style (13%).

### Community demographics

On average, African American churches were

planted in communities that were largely made up of the following ethnic groups: African American (42%), white (35%), Hispanic (13%), African or Caribbean decent (four percent), Asian (three percent), and other (three percent).

The survey asked church plants to select what ethnicity or race they specifically sought to reach in the community around the church. About two-thirds (68%) of churches focused on reaching African Americans. More than 90% of church planters said they also intentionally sought to reach a cross-cultural or multiethnic audience.

### Church sponsorship and funding

The LifeWay Research study found 48% of new churches were sponsored by another church. Among the sponsoring churches, 79% provided active prayer support while 53% provided mentoring to the church planter or church planting team, researchers noted.

"A sponsoring or mother church is often a crucial aspect of successful church [plants] for obvious reasons," said Carl Ellis, assistant professor of practical theology at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas and a consultant on the research project. "The fewer burdens a church plant has to carry in the initial stages, the greater is the likelihood that the new church will succeed."

The primary funding sources for African American church plants were core members (84%), affiliated denominations (62%), the church planter or church planting team (49%) and the personal financial support network of the church planter (44%).

The study also found 36% of church plants received funding from one or more sponsoring churches.

The average amount received by church starts from outside sources was \$21,818 in the first year. Average dollars received from members or attendees in the first year was \$33,301. During the first seven years, outside funding declined 44%, while dollars from members or attendees grew 211%, the research found.

Among the African American church plants surveyed, 29% were self-sufficient by their first year. Half achieved self-sufficiency by the fourth year and 60% by year ten.

Many church planters received support other than financial during their first years. Sixty percent said they received church planter mentoring, coaching or supervision, and training for themselves or their team.

### Church planters

The project indicated 55% of planters received church planting training prior to starting a church, but only 16% received specific training on the dynamics of the African American context prior to planting. Sixty-nine percent said they would benefit from that type of training today.

Two-thirds (69%) were bivocational the first two years of the plant's existence. Despite so many having a second job, 63% of church planters worked 40 hours a week or more at the church plant. Slightly more than half (52%) received some financial compensation for their work as a church planter, but only 38% of them termed the financial compensation adequate to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families.

The majority of church planters arrived on the field as a single staff member. Only six percent of the church plants had a paid, staffed team of more than one person to start the church.

Church planters from more than 20 denominations and several non-denominational churches participated in the study. Almost half (43%) were started since 2007. Most of them, 94% still exist.

Among the churches that closed, lack of financial support was the most common contributing factor.